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**EXCISE**

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**SECRET**

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

IS/FPC/CDR

Date: 5/19/93

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**SUBJECT :** Operation MONGOOSE - Propaganda Balloon  
 Operations Plan

**REFERENCE:** Memo to Brig. Gen. Lansdale dated 17 September  
 1962, Subject: Request for Approval to  
 Establish a Propaganda Balloon Delivery  
 Capability

### A. MISSION

To establish a seaborne propaganda balloon  
 launching facility for the infiltration of anti-CASTRO,  
 anti-Soviet propaganda into Cuba.

### B. METHOD

1. Helium-inflated balloons will be launched at  
 night from a foreign flag ship in international waters at  
 least ten miles off the coast of Cuba. The ship will  
 avoid the use of United States ports to the extent practi-  
 cable and will particularly avoid the Miami area. The ship  
 will be chartered by a Cuban exile sponsor respected by and  
 politically acceptable to a broad segment of the Cuban exile  
 community. He will also have the private financial means  
 to establish the facility without causing questions in the  
 exile community as to how the funds were raised. He will  
 be well known to all anti-CASTRO groups and above partisan  
 politics. The Agency has selected a candidate who meets  
 the above particulars. Although he has not yet been

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approached to undertake such an operation, he has in the past indicated a willingness to collaborate with the United States in support of anti-CASTRO activities. After the proposal is accepted by the sponsor, arrangements will be made for the sponsor to charter the proper type of vessel. He will also be placed in contact with a cleared firm that specializes in balloon technology. A commercial contract will then be drawn between the firm and the sponsor in which the firm agrees for a specified fee to provide and install balloon launching equipment on the ship, and train the members of the crew and other personnel in balloon launching techniques. In addition, the firm will agree to provide the balloons, helium and other supplies on a regular basis to the sponsor. For the secure and efficient conduct of the operation, the sponsor will deal only with the one cleared commercial firm. All supplies required for the operation are commercially available. The helium which is produced at a plant in [REDACTED] will be loaded on the vessel in Galveston, Texas, or some other Gulf port. The legal aspects involved in loading helium on board a foreign flag ship in a U. S. port are being studied by the Legal Counsel's office and will be taken into consideration when the final arrangements are formalized.

B1  
B3

2. The Cuban sponsor either personally or through his delegate will establish contact with all politically acceptable anti-CASTRO Cuban exile groups believed to have

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some assets or following in Cuba and offer the facility for their use. Within the above framework, priority shall be accorded the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC). In order to avoid contributing to division within the CRC, the means of communication shall be made available to the CRC as an entity and not to any of its components individually, except in unusual cases which will be agreed upon at the working level.

3. The sponsor will set certain guidelines (provided by the Agency) which must be met by the contributing groups if their propaganda is to be delivered by balloon. Upon receipt of the propaganda, provided it meets the specified guidelines, the sponsor will assume responsibility for its delivery. Every effort will be made by the Agency to insure that the guidelines are met, but it may not be possible in view of the extent of Cuban exile participation.

a. The following themes will be emphasized:

- (1) Return of the Revolution to its original acceptable aims.
- (2) The betrayal of the Revolution by CASTRO and the Communists.
- (3) Expose the contradictions between promises and performance.
- (4) The take over of Cuba by Soviet Bloc Communists.

(5) Appeal to the masses to cooperate with the resistance.

(6) Call upon the population to commit specific acts of administrative harassment, passive resistance and simple sabotage to thwart the actions of the Communist regime and generally promote the "gusano libre" (free worm) symbol which has become synonymous with resistance to the CASTRO regime.

b. Within the stated limitations, the following types of propaganda will be rejected:

(1) Propaganda which attempts to interpret U. S. policy regarding the liberation of Cuba or a specific Latin American country's policy regarding the liberation of Cuba.

(2) Propaganda which is directed at or which will contribute to the petulant quarreling amongst or between Cuban exile or resistance groups.

As far as practicable, the propaganda will be prepared upon the initiative of the Cuban exile groups. If necessary to keep the propaganda offensive moving, the Agency will through its contacts with exile groups and cleared Cuban exiles, assist the offensive by providing timely ideas, themes, news items and technical assistance. Propaganda may also be prepared for Soviet and other Bloc personnel stationed in Cuba.

4. The Cuban sponsor and perhaps a person designated by him will be the only non-Americans in direct contact with the Agency on this project. The Cuban sponsor will be responsible for chartering a foreign flag vessel with the necessary crew to carry out the operation. The ship's basic crew will be augmented by a meteorologist, two radio operators, and one radar tracker. The Agency will assist the sponsor to obtain the ship, crew and specialists. The training necessary for the conduct of the operation will be provided by a cleared commercial firm which specializes in balloon technology. Contact will be maintained by an Agency official who will be in direct contact with the Cuban sponsor or his representative. The Cuban sponsor and his representative will be the only persons witting of U. S. Government interest.

C. TECHNICAL CAPABILITY

Technical studies have been made which confirm the feasibility of balloon operations in this area. A launching vessel would cruise at night in a westerly direction approximately ten miles off the northern coast of the country. The balloons would be carried over Cuba by the low altitude easterly trade winds which prevail in that area. Meteorological studies indicate that the easterly trade winds in the Caribbean are among the most constant of any area in the world. Balloons can be launched at the rate of twenty per hour per station with a four pound payload per balloon. Four stations will afford a launching capability of eighty balloons per hour. As presently planned, the target for at least the first launching is the Matanzas-Havana area.

Depending on the type of paper used as well as the format and size of the leaflets, it is estimated that each balloon can deliver on target a payload of between 2,000 and 4,000 copies of a given leaflet. Assuming two balloon launching operations per month and the release of approximately 500 balloons per operation, it is estimated that between 2,000,000 and 4,000,000 leaflets can be dropped over Cuban targets each month. In addition, a wide variety of novelty items such as "gusano libre" pins, toy balloons in the shape of the "gusano libre", small plastic phonograph records, decals, stickers, etc. are readily available. The number of these which can be delivered on target during a launching operation will, of course, depend upon the weight and size of such items.

D. COSTS AND LEAD TIME

It will cost approximately \$50,000 to establish the balloon launching capability. This includes the purchase of launching, communications, and meteorological equipment and the training of personnel to conduct these operations. It will take a minimum of two months to establish an operational capability. Subsequently, it will cost \$22,000 per month for the first six month period to launch 1,000 balloons per month exclusive of the propaganda material to be delivered. Each balloon ready for launching, including the balloon itself, timer, ballast and helium, but exclusive of the propaganda material to be delivered, costs approximately \$15.50. The one-time cost of outfitting of the

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chartered vessel is estimated at approximately \$10,000. The recurring monthly costs for operation of a type of vessel as will be required for this operation amounts to approximately \$11,000.

E. RISKS AND SECURITY EVALUATION

Regardless of the launching facility used or the attribution of sponsorship, charges of U. S. involvement, tacit approval, or outright sponsorship will undoubtedly be generated. It is possible, particularly if the propaganda balloon missions have the desired impact in Cuba, that the Government of Cuba will react strongly and bring charges against the U. S. before the United Nations or other regional and international forums. Judging from past experience with Communist reactions in other areas of the world, the Cubans will probably accuse the United States of harboring and abetting criminals who violate Cuban air space with propaganda balloons causing a menace to aviation, burning cane fields, injuring children, and damaging buildings and homes. It is the view of the Operations Group (MONGOOSE) that these charges can be handled.

To reinforce the cover and weaken the anticipated Cuban Government's charges after the first balloon operation, the sponsor will be urged to hold a press conference or press interview outlining his effort to help the anti-CASTRO cause and pointing out the technical features of the operation which renders the operation relatively harmless to individuals or property.

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As non-inflammable helium and mechanical timing devices are used, it is impossible to start fires with these balloons. The material, polyethylene, and the design of the balloon are such that whatever the malfunction, including puncture by gun fire, the balloon will not become a free falling body, but instead flutters to the ground. There is a remote possibility that a child could be injured by a free falling timer which weighs two-tenths of a pound, an empty cardboard container which carries the leaflets or by a four pound bundle of leaflets, but this malfunction must include severance of the nylon cords which tie the payload and timer to the balloon. As previously stated, these are remote possibilities as the timer and empty cardboard container are carried out to sea by the balloon.

With regard to aircraft, a variety of tests have been conducted to ascertain the menace balloons can be to aircraft in flight. During the extensive tests conducted by CIA during the 1950's, it proved to be impossible to fly a propeller-driven aircraft into an unmoored balloon. The Federal Aviation Agency now even permits the launching of free meteorological balloons with a ten pound payload in congested air traffic areas in which commercial jet aircraft fly. In any case, as an added precaution, it is contemplated that the propaganda balloons will be launched only during those hours of the night when there are no scheduled commercial aircraft in flight over Cuba.

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